

Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 EUR-25 ISO-00 OMB-01 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07

H-03 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01

SP-03 SS-20 USIA-15 DRC-01 /116 W

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R 030745Z APR 74

FM AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2922

INFO AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON

AMEMBASSY DUBLIN

AMCONSUL BRISBANE

AMCONSUL MELBOURNRNE

AMCONSUL PERTH

AMCONSUL SYDNEY

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CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. N/A

TAGS: PINT,AS

SUBJECT: PRIME MINISTER WHITLAM APPOINTS FORMER DLP

SENATE LEADER GAIR AS AMBASSADOR, IN MOVE TO GAIN CONTROL OF
SENATE

REF: A) CANBERRA 1724 (NOTAL)

B) PERTH 85 (NOTAL)

1. SUMMARY: PRIME MINISTER WHITLAM ANNOUNCED IN PARLIAMENT APRIL 2
THAT HE HAD APPOINTED FORMER DLP LEADER SENATOR GAIR AUSTRALIAN
AMBASSADOR TO IRELAND AND THAT GAIR HAD ACCEPTED. GAIR SAID
HE WOULD RESIGN APRIL 3. LIBERAL OPPOSITION HAS DENOUNCED
APPOINTMENT AS MOST SHAMEFUL ACT EVER PERPETRATED BY AN
AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT, AND GAIR'S ERSTWHILE DLP COLLEAGUES
UNSUCCESSFULLY SOUGHT TO PERSUADE HIM TO REFUSE APPOINTMENT
ON GROUNDS IT WOULD WRECK DLP AND GIVE LABOR GOVERNMENT
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CONTROL OF SENATE. IN FACT, DEVELOPMENT ONLY marginally

IMPROVES ALP PROSPECTS IN SENATE ELECTIONS. QUEENSLAND PREMIER HAS SOUGHT TO BLOCK ELECTION FOR REPLACEMENT OF SENATOR GAIR AT SAME TIME AS REST OF SENATE ELECTIONS, ACTION WHICH, IF IT SUCCEEDS, WILL EFFECTIVELY STYMIE WHITLAM'S NAKEDLY POLITICAL PURPOSE IN APPOINTING SENATOR GAIR TO DIPLOMATIC POST. END SUMMARY

2. IN NAKELY CALCULATED POLITICAL MOVE PRIME MINISTER WHITLAM, IN HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES APRIL 2, ANNOUNCED THAT FORMER DEMOCRATIC LABOR PARTY LEADER SENATOR VINCENT GAIR HAD BEEN APPOINTED AUSTRALIAN AMBASSADOR TO IRELAND. AS WHITLAM AND GAIR HAVE BEEN BITTER POLITICAL RIVALS FOR MANY YEARS, THE ACTION HAS BEEN GREETED IN AUSTRALIA GENERALLY WITH INCREDULITY AND DISTASTE. IN A SUBSEQUENT PRESS CONFERENCE THE SAME DAY WHITLAM SAID THAT GAIR HAD ACCEPTED THE APPOINTMENT ALTHOUGH HE HAD NOT YET RESIGNED FROM THE SENATE. GAIR, FOR HIS PART HAD BEEN PRESSED BY HIS COLLEAGUES IN THE DLP TO RECONSIDER HIS ACCEPTANCE, BUT HE TOLD PRESS APRIL 2 HE HAD DECIDED NOT TO RECONSIDER AND WOULD RESIGN FROM SENATE APRIL 3, GAIR WAS EXPELLED FROM DLP PARLIAMENTARY PARTY APRIL 3 FOR RESIGNING HIS SENATE SEAT WITHOUT PERMISSION.

3. IN ACTION CLEARLY DESIGNED TO DAMPEN IMPACT OF GAIR APPOINTMENT AND RESIGNATION FROM SENATE, COUNTRY PARTY PREMIER BJELKE-PETERSEN OF QUEENSLAND ANNOUNCED EARLY ON APRIL 3 THAT GOVERNOR OF QUEENSLAND, SIR COLIN HANNAH, HAD ISSUED SHORTLY AFTER MIDNIGHT APRIL 3 WRITS OF ELECTION FOR SENATE MAY 18 FOR FIVE SENATE VACANCIES (SAME NUMBER AS ARE BEING ELECTED IN FIVE OTHER AUSTRALIAN STATES). PURPOSE OF UNUSUAL ACTION IS TO PREVENT ELECTION OF SIXTH SENATOR FROM QUEENSLAND, CONSEQUENT ON RESIGNATION OF SENATOR GAIR, AT SAME TIME AS FIVE OTHER SENATE SEATS. VACANT SEAT LEFT BY SENATOR GAIR, UNDER THIS ARRANGEMENT, WOULD BE FILLED LATER BY APPOINTMENT BY BJELKE-PETERSEN. EARLY INDICATIONS ARE THAT FEDERAL LABOR GOVERNMENT WILL TEST CONSTITUTIONALITY OF ACTION BY QUEENSLAND GOVERNMENT IN AUSTRALIAN HIGH COURT, BUT THERE HAVE BEEN NO FORMAL LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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STEPS TAKEN SO FAR.

4. ACTION BY PRIME MINISTER IS CLEARLY CALCULATED STEP TO IMPROVE PROSPECTS FOR LABOR PARTY TO GAIN CONTROL OF SENATE AND TO REMOVE EXISTING ROADBLOCK TO ENACTMENT OF CRITICAL PORTIONS OF ALP FEDERAL PROGRAM. AS INDICATED IN REF A, ALP IS MINORITY IN SENATE AS PRESENTLY CONSTITUTED, AND LABOR PROSPECTS FOR GAINING

CONTROL OF SENATE HAVE BEEN RATED AS VERY PPOR OR EVEN NON-EXISTENT, EVEN BY PRO-LABOR COMMENTATORS. RECENT DEFEAT OF ALP IN WESTERN AUSTRALIAN ELECTIONS (REF B) SHOWS THAT STRING OF ALP LOSSES IN STATE ELECTIONS IS CONTINUING, FURTHER REINFORCING IMPRESSION GIVEN BY PUBLIC OPINION POLLS CONTINUALLY ADVERSE TO ALP OVER PAST YEAR OR SO.

5. IF BJELKE-PETERSEN'S PLOY OF PREVENTING ELECTION FOR SEAT VACATED BY SENATOR GAIR HOLDS UP IN COURT TEST, WHITLAM ACTION HAS BEEN FLASH IN THE PAN WITHOUT RESULTS. POLITICAL PROSPECTS REMAIN AS INDICATED IN REF A, WITH LABOR PROSPECTS FOR CONTROLLING SENATE NOT PARTICULARLY BRILLIANT. INDEED, SUCH AS ACT OF POLITICAL CYNICISM WHICH FAILS OF ITS PURPOSE WOULD PROBABLY DAMAGE PRIME MINISTER WHITLAM, AT LEAST MARGINALLY. EVEN IF HIGH COURT SHOULD ORDER ELECTIONS TO BE HELD FOR SIXTH SENATE SEAT IN QUEENSLAND, SITUATION- WILL NOT IMPROVE ALL THAT MARKEDLY FOR WHITLAM. IN THAT SITUATION, WHILE LABOR WILL PROBABLY WIN THREE SEATS IN QUEENSLAND (COMPARED TO TWO SEATS, IF ONLY FIVE SENATE SEATS ARE FILLED), LIBERAL-COUNTRY -DLF HAVE GOOD PROSPECT OF GETTING REMAINING THREE SEATS. TO GAIN EFFECTIVE CONTROL OF SEANTE, LABOR MUST THEN PICK UP ONE ADDITIONAL SENATE SEAT IN NEW SOUTH WALES, TASMANIA, AND SOUTH AUSTRALIA, AN ACCOMPLISHMENT WHICH SEEMS TO BE OUT OF LABOR'S REACH, WHITLAM APPOINTMENT OF GAIR HAS SLIGHTLY IMPROVED ALP CHANCES OF GAINING CONTROL OF SENATE IN MUCH THE SAME WAYS AN AMERICAN BASEBALL MANAGER PUTS IN TO A LEFT-HANDED PITCHER AGAINST A LEFT-HANDED BATTER TO IMPROVE THE STATISTAICAL CHANCES OF GETTING HIM OUT.

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6. MEANWHILE , LOBERAL OPPOSITION HAS BEEN SUFFUSED WITH RAGE, BOTH IN PARLIAMENT IN CANBERRA AND IN QUEENSLAND. LIBERAL OPPOSITION LEADER SNEDDEN WAS DECALRED OUT OF ORDER AND HIS REMARKS ORDERED STICKEN FROM HANSARD REPORT OF DEBATES APRIL 2 WHEN HE DENOUNCED GAIR APPOINTMENT AS QTE MOST SHAMEFUL ACT EVER PERPETRATED BY AN AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT END QTE. DLP SENATORS MET WITH SENATOR GAIR IN CANBERRA APRIL 2 TOLD HIM THEY CONSIDERED APPOINTMENT WAS BRIBE OFFERED BY WHITLAM , AND ADDED THAT HIS ACCEPTANCE OF APPOINTMENT COULD WRECK DLP AND HAND CONTROL OF SENATE OVER TO LABOR GOVERNMENT. AS NOTED ABOVE,GAIR MAINTAINED HIS DECISION TO ACCEPT APPOINTMENT , AND WAS
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: AMBASSADOR DESIGNATE, OPPOSITION PARTIES, CENTRAL LEGISLATURE
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 03 APR 1974
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: morefirh
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1974CANBER01983
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D740074-0515
From: CANBERRA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1974/newtext/t19740469/aaaacldg.tel
Line Count: 162
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: A) CANBERRA 1724 (NOTAL)
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: morefirh
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags: ANOMALY
Review Date: 08 JUL 2002
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <08 JUL 2002 by kelleyw0>; APPROVED <01 AUG 2002 by morefirh>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: PRIME MINISTER WHITLAM APPOINTS FORMER DLP SENATE LEADER GAIR AS AMBASSADOR, IN MOVE TO GAIN CONTROL OF
TAGS: PINT, AS, EI, DLP, (GAIR)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005